

DIABETES IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

****Southwest Virginia represents the Cumberland Plateau, Lenowisco, and Mount Rogers health districts, which include the following counties: Bland, Bristol, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, and Wise counties, and the cities of Norton and Galax.**

Diabetes is a major problem in Southwest Virginia. The Lenowisco Health District is particularly hard hit. In 2003, approximately 17 percent of all adults in the district were diagnosed with diabetes. This is 2.4 times the state rate of 7.2 percent. It is estimated that 1,667 individuals are living with undiagnosed diabetes and another 57 children under age 18 are living with Type 1 diabetes in the Lenowisco health district.

Risk Factors

The host of risk factors for diabetes includes obesity, lack of physical activity, hypertension, high cholesterol and smoking. Adults in Southwest Virginia have higher rates for each of these risk factors than the state rate for each one.

Diabetes itself is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

What VDH is Doing

VDH's Diabetes Control Program has designated the Lenowisco health district for special attention in its fight against the disease. The district is the site of one of three diabetes control projects in the state. The project's mission is to decrease the number of diabetes related hospitalizations and deaths, and to promote the healthy management of diabetes by encouraging eye and foot exams, hemoglobin A1c testing, blood glucose and blood pressure monitoring and vaccinations.

The Lenowisco project conducted a number of activities from April 2005 to March 2006. These included monthly "In Control" classes to help participants reduce the complications of diabetes through self-management and implemented a three-month wellness challenge to increase physical activity and weight loss. The effort attracted about 180 participants. Project leaders also collaborated with community health centers in the district to start educational classes and develop a registry of diabetes patients.

Recently, VDH started programs in the Lenowisco Health District to increase the level of physical activity among seniors and teach self-management techniques to older adults who have been diagnosed with a chronic disease such as diabetes.